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ABSTRACT

Until students have opportunities to discover the power of personal expression through writing in the narrative mode, it is dangerous to teach them writing solely in terms of institutional discourse. The goals of institutional prose, or professional writing, are not determined by the writer, and often demand an "objective" style that removes human agency and appears free of moral consequence. Institutions condition people how to feel about realities that the institutions themselves define. Much of this conditioning is done through writing constrained in tone, strategies, and constructions of subjectivity. Although students need training in these rules of writing hierarchical discourse, they must also recognize that institutional discourse often requires the writer to create managed feelings contradictory to his or her interests. Institutional prose should be taught as a social and vocational function, whose goals are determined by institutions and not by the writers. However, teachers should first encourage students to find their own voices, discovering the social and historical context of their worlds through the narrative mode of thought. (Thirteen references are appended.) (MM)

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Some Political Implications of Teaching Institutional Discourse

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Socrates asked Gorgias if he would teach the tools of rhetoric to an immoral man. Gorgias replied that he would not. "First, I would make him moral."

How we undertake such moral education and education for self-knowledge is an old debate but one that is no means resolved. Today I propose to examine some of the political implications of privileging the teaching institutional discourse.

Also, I will discuss these in terms of working for institutions. Many institutions require writers to advocate positions in which they do not believe or to advocate positions that they come to believe as a result of institutional conditioning through "managed feelings." Such advocacy is a reality many writers will have to confront as employees.

There is a growing view in the profession that writing instruction in college should start with initiating students into the discourse community of institutions. (Bartholomae, Bizzell).

Les Perelman argues in "The Context of Classroom Writing," (CE, Sept. 1986) that "the essential goal of writing instruction ... should be to help our students to attain the pragmatic competence necessary for institutional discourse." That is, Perelman argues for privileging the teaching of institutional discourse over other discourses. The focus of composition theorists such as Donald Murray on writing as self-discovery ignores writing as social activity, Perelman says, and is therefore limited. Thus, writing from a position of self-expression and self-interest is only one of many positions from which one can write. Other positions are those dictated by institutional or ritual roles, and each of these roles "exists apart from the person who occupies it." Sincerity in such discourse "exists primarily in the requirement that the individual believe that he or she is acting out the role correctly, not that he or she necessarily believes what is being said. ... A student doesn't need to believe what he or she writes, but only needs to give the appearance of believing it." Perelman goes on to say that "in institutional writing, the institutional context demands that a speaker or writer fulfill the appropriate role. The penalty

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for adhering to some sort of personal self at the expense of the institutional self is often severe. ... While we should not urge our students to ignore their own personal ethics, we also need to have them consider the ethics dictated by the specific roles they occupy as writers."

Here's the danger in creating "institutional selves" who "consider the ethics dictated by the specific roles of they occupy as writers."

The goals of institutional prose, or professional writing, are generally determined by others, not the writer. The writer becomes a means to someone else's ends. Hierarchical institutional discourse often demands an "objective," non-emotional, impersonal style that removes human agency and appears free of moral consequences. It generally reflects in its tone and style the elements of what Belenky **et al.** in **Women's Ways of Knowing** call "separate knowing": adversarial, critical, detached from the object of knowledge, and impersonal.

In a profit-oriented and service-oriented economy, most institutions for which college graduates will work shall require that they manage their feelings for commercial or other organizational ends and to manipulate others to do the same. Further, institutions require employees to fulfill institutional roles to realize institutional goals often at the price of personal alienation and isolation.

Arlie Russell Hochschild in **The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling** points out that "Management buys the ability of a worker to induce or suppress his or her own feelings in order to produce an emotional state in a third party, the customer or client."

When private emotion crosses over into public, commercialized relations, the process is "transmutation" : Private emotion is managed to generate public emotion. Emotional management becomes emotional work which becomes emotional labor, a commodity. The manager's task is to harness "worker's selves to that task of transmutation, [thus] harnessing their ability to manage their own emotions and those of others around them."

Most college graduates who work as professionals will have to transmute their private emotion into emotional labor and to "harness" other to the task if they are managers. And much of their communication on the job, either to clients or to other employees, will be through writing constrained by the rules of institutional discourse.

One way institutions obtain the consent of their employees for the emotional work required of them is through conditioning for social control, conditioning being a great source of power of organizations (John Kenneth Galbraith, **The Anatomy of Power.**) Institutions condition people how to feel about realities that the institutions themselves define.

> Strong organizations require the careful internal conditioning of their members for maximum external effect.... This called indoctrination, a term that attests openly to the purpose of winning belief. Only when this belief is assured is the individual deemed qualified to pursue the external purposes of the organization. (Galbraith 62)

Initially, the goals of individuals may not be the same as those of the institutions they serve. One method of conditioning to gain belief is to require employees to fulfill institutional roles that carry out the goals of the institution often at the expense of the self, although such expense may not be apparent at first.

For example, Hochschild points out that one kind of institutional discourse, scientific writing "is an extension of institutional control over feeling. The overuse of passive verb forms, the avoidance of 'I,' the preference for Latinate nouns, and for the abstract over the concrete, are customs that distance the reader from the topic and limit emotionality. In order to seem scientific, writers obey conventions that inhibit emotional involvement. There is a purpose in such 'poor' writing" (50 n.)

To reiterate what Perelman says, institutional discourse requires the writer to advocate a position he or she does not believe in and to obey the contraints the institution sets forth or pay a severe penalty. But generally after indoctrination the writers think they believe in the role assigned, or will convince themselves that they believe through the self-deception called by Hochschild "deep acting." Tragedy of "deep acting" is that it alienates employees from their true emotional selves. Deep acting helps employees to do the work--i.e., to construct a worker selves that believe in the work much as Method actors calls on emotions related to those of the characters portrayed.

Management taylorizes emotions to get "appropriate" responses. John Kenneth Galbraith suggests why:

> Nothing so weakens the external power of a public agency ... as the undisciplined expression of dissenting views from within. Thus, the constant struggle to suppress such dissent. (60)

Therefore, many companies use psychological screening to get the right kind of workers (those who show enthusiasm, concern for others, ameniability to commands). This sort of screening includes psychological tests, lie detector tests, and occasionally drug tests that demean employees. Management wants employees who already have demonstrated aptitudes for self-suppression beyond that required for civil society.

How do we as teachers deal with these institutional realities? Perelman and others recognize the nature of

hierarchical discourse and that we train students to learn the rules of such discourse. But at the same time, we need to go further to teach students that institutional discourse often requires the writer to create managed feelings contradictory to his or her interests. Teaching institutional prose is not teaching writing as a social activity that is liberating and democratic; it is teaching writing as a social and vocational function the goals of which are determined by institutions and not the writers. They become means to someone's or something else's ends, whether good or bad.

Writers need to know that what they do in the names of their institutions have consequences which they should be prepared to accept in moral and ethical terms.

Richard Ohmann in **English in America** makes a devastating critique of the shortcomings of one example institutional discourse, **The Pentagon Papers**. He describes the rules for the institutional discourse that the advisors to Lyndon Johnson had to follow in the 1960's during the Vietnam war:

> The problem-solving mode of writing, because of severe technical restrictions it lays on argument, makes people into elements of the problem, to be manipulated conceptually as well as physically. (202)

The memos about the United States war policies in Vietnam never discussed the pain and destruction inflicted upon the lives of the Vietnamese people. Nor did the discourse rules allow for discussion of the war aims in Southeast Asia; only the implementation of those aims could be discussed. Ohmann continues his critique:

> The rules of the **writing** game did not, of course, cause Vietnam. But they made it easier to think and do the unthinkable, because of the way they interposed mechanical analysis between the men of power and human and moral issues.... Problem formulation and problem solving, distancing of people, abstraction away from historical circumstance, disappearance of the writer as a being with social attributes, and denial of politics: these are the threads that run through ... [**The Pentagon Papers**]. (206)

There are good reasons for resisting the rules of such discourse communities because the writers don't show a "concern for the human condition" and take responsibility for the consequences of their writing. Taking responsibility for what one writes is necessary to become aware of one's social obligations for collective action to determine larger social goals. We want to avoid pedagogies that seem to deny that the writer has any social obligation beyond obedience to institutional constraints. As Richard Ohmann says, the authors of **The Pentagon Papers** argued well, following all the

rules of argumentative discourse, except that they were never allowed to ask one question: Why are we in Vietnam?

I am not arguing here that students should not learn the rhetorical means of persuasion demanded by institutions, nor learn how to identify the goals of institutions and the roles those institutions impose upon them. I agree with Perelman when he says (in response to my comment about his original article CE, 49 (Nov 1987), 837) that we should teach students to uncover what the strictures of institutions are and that they understand that discourse "occurs in a social context and that the analysis of the social codes constituting that context should be an integral part of the writing process." But we don't do this first.

First, we encourage the kind of writing that allows the students to find their own voices by telling their stories about their own lives to discover the social, historical context of their worlds through the narrative mode of thought. "Paul Ricouer argues that narrative is built upon concern for the human condition" (Bruner, **Actual Minds, Possible Worlds** 14). The value of the narrative mode is its concern for the human condition and its positioning its writers to see themselves in relation to others and the world about them. Institutional discourse, as Richard Ohmann demonstrates, shifts the writer's focus from concern for the human condition to solving the problem.

Jerome Bruner writes in **Actual Minds, Possible Worlds**:

> It is conceivable that our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us. (69)

Writing in the narrative mode about the self is a vital method of self-discovery and self-knowledge that students should engage in because

> The ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future.... Life as led is inseparable from a life as told -- or more bluntly, life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold: Freud's **psychic reality**. (32)

And it should be a reality that resists institutional manipulation. We teachers of Freshman composition need to be careful that we don't send the message to student writers that learning to write effectively means to obey constraints that prepare them for institutional social control. We must avoid creating the kind of "good student" that Paulo Freire warns us against:

> Generally speaking, the good student is not the one who is restless or intractable, or one who reveals one's doubts or wants to know the reason behind facts, or one who breaks with preestablished models, or one who denounces a mediocre bureaucracy, or one who refuses to be an object. To the contrary, the so-called good student is the one who repeats, who renounces critical thinking, who adjusts to models, and who 'thinks it pretty to be a rhinoceros.' [Ionesco] (Freire, 117)

There are major questions that we as teachers of writing must struggle to answer. Before we teach the rules of institutional discourse, shouldn't we teach that some institutions often have unworthy goals, and that writers should, as part of their educations, think and write about such issues to avoid being manipulated unwittingly by institutions? Perhaps they might decide not to join the institutions they disapprove of. If they do decide to join institutions with goals contrary to their own, they will know the price to be exacted of them.

Because of the political implications of institutional discourse, I argue against privileging it over personal narrative writing. It is preferable to have students determine their own realities through exploring their own stories than to have students learning only the rhetorical skills demanded by institutions.

Until students have opportunities to discover the liberating power of writing to order their experiences and to discover, therefore, meaning in their own social and political contexts, it becomes dangerous to teach writing solely in terms of institutional discourse.

Geoffrey Chase points our pedagogical way:

> We need to [teach students discourse conventions] in a way that allows them to problematize their existence and to place themselves in a social and historical context through which they can come to better understand themselves and the world around them (Freire 55-56)" ...
> We need, as teachers, to provide environments in which students are encouraged to see themselves as human actors who can make a difference in the world. We must encourage students to affirm and analyze their own experiences and histories, not without question, but as starting points for connecting with the wider culture and society. (Chase 21)

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